

Arts Journal
Spring 2011

THE
BELLTOWER



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The Bell Tower Arts Journal

Volume 5 2010 – 2011

Editor

Linda Gary, Ph. D.

Editorial Board

The editorial board for the journal is comprised of full-time faculty members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, and the Fine Arts Department. The editorial board has the final approval on all selections and publication decisions.

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Derrick White

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Rebecca Stewart

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The selection committee for the The Bell Tower Arts Journal is comprised of student members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, the Art Club, and faculty advisors.

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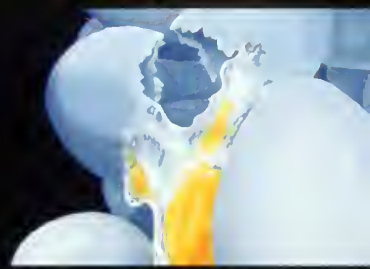
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cravings are
quite hard
to sink



The depth and
beauty of the
variety

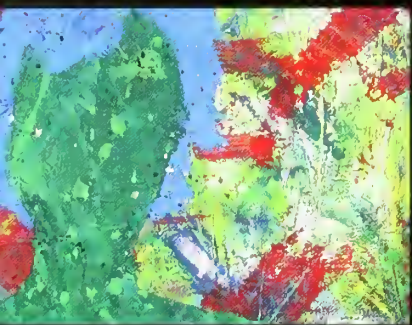


All is quiet as
ears listen to the
eastern wind blow





my better
judgement would
have been more
than pleased



Amusing ourselves
with humor



My words blocked
by the earth in
your ears



About the Title:

Just as the Bell Tower at Tyler Junior College chimes on the quarter hour to mark the passage of time, it reminds students of the harmony which surrounds them in their educational pursuits. Music, dance, theatre, art, athletics, and academics blend to make Tyler Junior College a beacon to the community, the state, and the world at large.

As the echoes of the chords filter through the oaks, their vibrations tremble far beyond the confines of the brick archways and winding walks where students gather. Tyler Junior College is a lofty tower of educational opportunity for students who have come from all parts of the world. The Bell Tower Arts Journal proudly hails the accomplishments of its hallowed halls and beckons those who would seek both its traditions and the promise of tomorrow.

~Judith Bateman, 2006

Editorial Policy:

The Bell Tower Arts Journal is sponsored by the Psi Gamma Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society. We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, photography, and fine and graphic art by current Tyler Junior College students. We accept submissions for consideration only during the fall semester each year for possible publication in the subsequent spring semester. The Bell Tower Arts Journal is entirely student generated and seeks to provide a publishing venue for the rich artistic expression of TJC students.

Our goal is to create a publication that is a high quality, content-rich source of literary and artistic expression on a wide range of topics and themes. Therefore, we seek unique, insightful work displaying vivid, lively language and artistic skill.

All submissions must be the original work of the student writer or artist who submits it for consideration or publication. We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work. Every attempt is made by the editor to assure originality. All literary pieces will be submitted to turnitin.com for an originality report. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to submit only his or her own literary and artistic work.

Moreover, while we strongly support intellectual freedom as the right of every individual from all points of view, we do not accept work deemed pornographic, profane, exploitative, or that seeks to cause injury to an individual or group.

Tyler Junior College gives equal consideration to all applicants for admission, employment and participation in its programs and activities without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability or veteran status.

Acknowledgements:

The editors of The Bell Tower Arts Journal gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance of the following people: Shelley Caraway, Interim Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Sarah Harrison, Director of English Language Studies; Doug Crawford, Publications Coordinator, and Fred Peters, Director of Marketing and Public Information.

Submit your work for the next Bell Tower:

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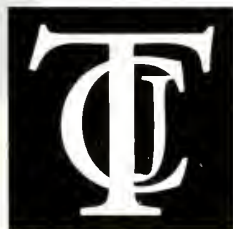
Students are limited to three submissions total. All submissions must be the original work of the student writer or artist. We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work.

Submission deadline for the 2011-2012 Bell Tower Arts Journal is October 21, 2011.

Visit the Liberal Arts and Sciences Office (Jenkins Hall) or the office of Dr. Linda Gary in J164 to find the full submission guidelines.

For more information visit www.tjc.edu/BellTower/

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I wasn't ready
to face the
Predators again



Your voice
cooled me



Lying on the floor
in a puddle

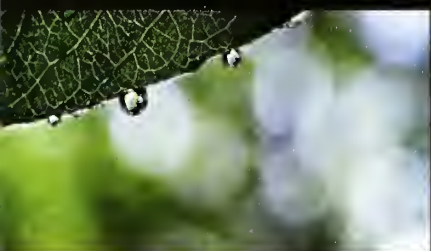




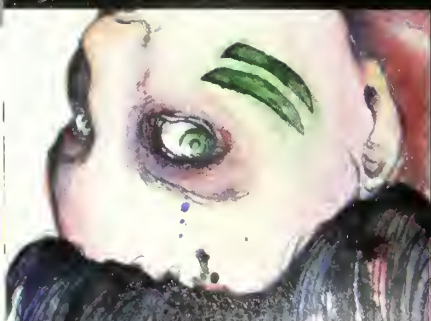
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rapidly like water
pouring in a lake



certainly taking
its time



sweet songs of
winter through her
hair



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Disguised as one
I love,he walks



My bubbly baby
bounces



There is no purer
moment than when
one first wakes up.





A Fear of Falling

Amanda Hatseld / Mineola / Acrylic and Pencil

A Full Moon

The sun sets after a fair day,
Yet clouds of darkness stray;
The night sky makes its way
To indicate owls, sloths, and crickets can play.
What about the full moon?

Night spreads rapidly like water pouring in a lake.
Whatever sunlight is left, darkness breaks,
Gloom and shadows darkness make;
How much time will it take
To appear the full moon?

Night-sky darkness sheds its own light,
Scaring the sunlight with a fright;
It grasps the world with all its might.
Can this darkness hold tight
And prevent the coming of the full moon?

Behold! The moon looms;
The black night it dooms,
Sweeping its rays like brooms.
Because of this, no one glooms;
Gives us hope does the full moon.

Our world is black as darkness this moment--
Strong and powerful is God's judgment.
He allows crafty and clever men as His instrument.
Because of this, we must make a statement:
To the world, we must be a full moon.

Kyle A. Fleming / Flint



Somos Guerreros

Daniel Haddad / Tyler / Ink

Come Closer and You Will See

Over here I stand, separated as the others;
Come closer and you will see;
It will be all right. Am I not a person, too?
You are safe here. What do you see of me?
Why do you have to acknowledge only our differences?
With your own eyes you see me;
The facts of our similarities number in the thousands.
Look closer, past your initial opinion and see
The person who lives within has a soul.
We together have hopes and dreams; this is key.
I, like you, have fears and have seen disappointment;
More alike than not are we.
Provisions are required to sustain the life in us;
We were both born into this world, hear my plea.
Homes and families, we both may have;
Equally, we crave peace and sincerity.
It takes resources for us both to thrive
As well as others around the globe. I believe
Faith accompanies us together along the way.
The same we are—can't you see?
My culture may be a little strange to you, for sure,
As yours, no doubt, is to me.
But mutually we can learn and accept
The depth and beauty of the variety.
Thank goodness, we are not all surrounded by the drabness of grey:
This world is full of color and complexity.
There are rainbows all around us in the hearts and souls of others;
Just take the time to comprehend—come closer, and you will see.

Janet York / Tyler

The Hunt

The morning was cold and crisp; it was late November. I had climbed into my deer stand before daylight and was now looking out into a little clearing in the woods. A heavy frost covered the ground; daylight was not far off, but for now it was dark with a hint of grey in the far eastern sky. I shivered a little from the cold as I slowly scanned my surroundings. I could dimly see the trees around me and small bits of brush in the clearing below my stand. The air was cold and still; I was bundled in warm clothing, but the cold attacked my exposed ears and face, making them start to ache. I turned toward the eastern sky and watched its slow transformation into a new day. It went from a light grey to a hint of hazy pink: low orange covered the very tip tops of the distant treetops almost like a paint bucket that was spilled, and the paint was slowly spreading into the freezing air. The sun coming up was a beautiful thing, and although the sun had not poked its face above the horizon yet, the clearing was becoming more visible. My breath was making little puffs of white clouds into this cold air. I shivered a tad more and tucked deeper into my coveralls. I thought of all the other people in this world snuggled tight inside their warm beds at this early hour while I was alone in this chilly tree in the deep woods. I was glad I had come, though, and wouldn't have traded my hunt for the warm bed and the few more hours of slumber. Far off I could hear a hoot owl call.

There is an old hunter's superstition that hearing a hoot owl call meant success on the hunt; I hoped it held true. Now that I could see the clearing better, I noticed that it was a deep white against the dark sky. The frost had covered all the low-lying trees along with the cropped grass. A bird started to chirp as it woke up, and farther down I could hear another one answer it. It was still too early for them to fly from their evening roost. I could see up the dim trail leading into the clearing and could even make out the golden trail of corn I had sprinkled on the ground—bait for whatever animal that wandered down it—but I was already picturing in my mind a trophy buck with his head down silently munching on it. The sun was slowly touching the edge of the tree tops ever so gently. The sun was certainly taking its time making its morning appearance I thought. I wished it would hurry up so that I might derive a little warmth from its morning rays. Off to my right, a squirrel started to scamper across a big old oak tree with branches that seemed to extend all the way to the heavens.

I looked again to the far eastern sky that had now turned from a clear black night to a deep pink and light red. I trembled a little and took a breath as I took in this stunning picture. I reached for my thermos; it was an old Stanley brand that had once been green in color, but the green had long since chipped off of its metal case and left it a rusted silver. It had belonged once to my grandfather, and I thought back to all the cold morning hunts on which it had accompanied him, and I smiled a little as I recalled his hunting stories that I would listen to and hang on every word. I slowly screwed off the metal top that also served as the cup. I began to unscrew the plastic cork at the top of the thermos. The unscrewing of this cork always squeaked on a cold morning, and this morning was no different. I cringed a little, hoping no deer had heard the noise, but the clearing below me was void of any wildlife. I slowly poured myself a cup of the scalding, black coffee. The coffee gurgled as it left the thermos and hit the bottom of the cold cup. Small wisps of steam were coming off the coffee as I cupped both hands around my warm cup, hoping it could coax a little warmth into my numb fingers. I slowly raised the cup to my lips and took a sip as the steam warmed my face, and the rich aroma filled my nose. I looked again into the clearing; the sun was just now starting to touch one corner, and the frost there sparkled a little as it reflected the light. I heard a little rustling noise to my right. I looked, but nothing was there. I reached again for my cup, and that's when I noticed a little smudge of tawny brown out of the corner of my eye. I turned slowly and watched as a deer emerged from the woods. It walked unhurriedly with its head up, looking cautiously around for any lurking danger.

It was a buck, a nice eight-point. My breath began to quicken immediately. The buck slowly took a couple of tedious steps towards the corn, and he stopped and stuck his nose to the air to test the wind. This was an animal that was at home in these woods and survived every day using his God-given senses. He slowly put his head back down and scanned the clearing but did not see me in the tree. My heartbeat raced as excitement and adrenaline surged through my body. It's the feeling that every true hunter feels when he faces a quarry—buck fever. It causes grown men to tremble like a whipped puppy; it is the true excitement of the hunt.

The buck lifted his feet gently as he walked. Careful to not make any noise, I put my coffee cup down quietly and reached for my gun. It was a Remington model 700, and it was worn and scuffed from years of brush hunting; it had claimed more than one animal's life. The gun easily found my shoulder as my cheek rested against the stock. The buck was totally unaware I was there. He had made his way to the corn trail and was munching up the dry kernels. He would take a few bites and then lift his head to look around as he chewed. His horns were a mahogany brown and deep in color. He was close enough that I could see his dark, black eyes. He stood out well against the white-frosted clearing. I was looking through the scope, trying to calm my breath and tell myself to hold the gun steady and take my time. The buck had still not seen me, and I was trying to remain as still as possible. I nestled the crosshairs of my scope tight behind his shoulder and took one long, deep breath and held it. With my thumb I slowly pushed off the safety, and it made a loud metallic CLICK—very audible through the cold woods.

The buck tossed his head up quickly, but his body stayed still as he looked up into the tree I was in. Just a little more tightening of my finger around the trigger, and he would collapse into a kicking heap. He was looking intently up into my tree. He knew something was in that tree, but he couldn't tell what it was. I tried, but I couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger on this buck. I didn't quite know why, but something inside told me to let this one walk, that my hunt was already a success. The hunt was getting to be out in Mother Nature, watching a new day, alone. The hunt was actually getting to see wildlife undisturbed by the city bustle. I was glad I was there, and I didn't want to ruin the stunning scene of this frosted clearing with the sharp crack of my rifle.

The buck put his head back down after awhile and continued to eat. My heart was regaining its normal speed. I looked around at the sky and the forest once more. It was now light enough to make out every tree. A new day was born, and it was a truly a remarkable thing. The buck was steadily eating the corn although he was keeping one eye pointed towards my tree as he ate. I picked up my still-steaming coffee and took another sip. The buck slowly started to meander up the trail. He stopped and looked back up at my tree and stared intently at it for what seemed like several long minutes. I remained motionless and stared directly into the animal's eyes, hoping he wouldn't spook and run. The buck just turned back to the trail and walked unhurriedly away.

Allen G. Johnson / Whitehouse



Stairway to Eden

Charlotte Motes / Whitehouse / 35mm Photograph

The Way Home

As I wander through this forest of misdeeds and tragedies, "Is it worth it?" I ask as if expecting an answer to come from these desolate woods. I chuckle as I follow the path I had chosen. Knowing that I could never turn back, never go home, never start anew, never see my family, and yet, I think it is better this way—somehow.

I feel as if I am looking for something—or maybe someone. What could it be? Is it something I have lost? Something misplaced it cannot be for I have never traveled here. For if I had, I most certainly would remember the deadly silence of the wind playing tag with the leaves or the trees that seem to be bending in towards me as if to listen to my slightest word. Why is that, I wonder? Is there a story to be told—a truth to be heard? And why was I in the center? It's as if I had entered upon a stage with the spotlight directing its maddening glare at me. The wind, growing impatient, throws a fit and causes the leaves to rage in anger. As they both settle, so do my thoughts—but wait, is there another performer on this dark stage? Yes, someone who seems familiar to me. Disguised as one I love, he walks towards me.

Had I not left him behind, so no harm could come to him? If so, then how can he, of all people, be in this darkest of places?

As he draws near me, all are on the edges of their seats. The light grows more intense, glaring at me and waiting for me to speak. As my thoughts race each other to the finish line, I realize it is my turn to act. The familiar stranger, now no more than a foot or two away, seems to be glowing with an eerie light. It all seems right, but I know it is wrong. With an outstretched hand, he beckons me; with a seductive whisper, he calls me to him.

Oh, how I wish I could, but I must not. I know not why—only that I cannot go to him for the path on which he travels is somehow not safe. I turn my back upon the alluring stranger to hear a loud inhuman screech, as if a creature has lost its prey. My back still turned I see a bright, almost protecting, flash of light. I turn now to where the man had once stood, but left there is only the smell of raging defeat. I know not what happened—only that I was somehow saved from the danger I had not seen yet somehow sensed.

The wind leaves to play tag elsewhere as the trees and leaves mutter amongst themselves obviously pleased with the show they have just witnessed. I walk farther along the path now before me.

As a pleasant smile creeps its way across my face, a feeling of peace settles over me. I come to a clearing with a small cabin neatly tucked in the middle. It seems as if I am gliding towards the door. Something catches my eye. Lying there upon the map is a white envelope. I bend to pick it up, and flipping it over, I see my name written in gold and shining so bright. I gasp and fall to my knees as tears begin to fall. As I read the words—

Welcome home, my child.

I have been waiting for you.

Signed,

I AM.

Emily Marugg / Rusk

Running Away from Second Grade

The brittle autumn leaves crunched under my feet as I trudged up the sidewalk towards Oak Harbor Elementary School. The crisp fall breeze snapped my brown hair around like whips, but I ignored it because something more important needled at my brain. Though my conscience pushed me towards that school, my better judgment would have been more than pleased to stay home under my toasty comforter. But, alas, comfort played hide and seek with me, and it wouldn't be found until I answered for a silly trick I'd played the day before.

My mom has described me as her mellowest child. I didn't get into much trouble if I wasn't encouraged by my siblings. My dad was in the Navy, and my parents knew how to strike the match of fear into us with that ancient form of discipline—spanking. We lived in Oak Harbor, Washington, which is a Navy Base on Whidbey Island in the northwest corner of the "Evergreen State." It rained so much there that people were suspicious of anyone named Noah. However, the pristine beauty and charm of the area made the over-active precipitation tolerable. Because of all the rain, the majestic forests of Ponderosa pines and Douglas firs remained wrapped in their green, gorgeous splendor all year long. Add the lush, rain-forest valleys, the beaches of the Pacific, and the mighty snow-capped peaks, and you had paradise in your grasp.

Our neighborhood boasted of rows of neat, middle-class homes, a well-built playground, and the elementary school within walking distance. On my way to school that particular day, I pondered how fluidly I had glided through first-grade year. My teacher then was Mrs. Valentine, which was a fitting name for a lady who was all heart. She made me feel so proud when I learned how to tell time. I wondered why this year had decided to turn its nose up at me.

My second-grade teacher may well have been the first person in my young life that I truly did not like. She ran her class like an ex-corrections officer who was adjusting to new disciplinary techniques suitable for seven-year olds. I disliked her so much that I don't even remember her name. Mrs. B. will do since I do remember the first letter anyway.

One of the unpleasant memories Mrs. B. granted me was the time I was standing near her desk, patiently waiting my turn to ask her a question. I don't remember what that question was because it shattered into a million shards when she finally turned to me, her glaring eyes staring accusingly. I was sent to my desk with strict orders to write twenty-five times "I will mind my own business." I slumped in my chair, overwhelmingly humiliated. I knew that nosiness was not in my nature, but it was exasperating to know that Mrs. B. thought it was. I proceeded to write "I will mind my own biznis," unaware that I was cutting corners due to that misspelling.

As the school year slowly and miserably progressed, I began to believe that my plight was invisible to Mrs. B. The day of the popcorn party that belief was solidified. She announced to the class that all students who had turned in their homework would have popcorn after recess. She also read the names of the students whose papers she had not received, and mine was one of them.

"But—Mrs. B., I did turn in my homework!"

"If you'd turned it in, Lorie, it would be with the rest of the papers."

My skin crawled with the chill of cruel injustice as I imagined sitting at my desk, tortured by the buttery aroma and satisfied giggles dancing in the air. At that moment I decided that I would not be in that classroom after recess.

A crowd of screaming kids burst through the double doors to claim their place in line for the swings and monkey bars. As for me, I stood by myself in the ominous afternoon, urging my brain to conjure up an idea that would excuse me from school. The task was quite difficult as I wasn't much of a liar. I had no choice. I flagged down one of the playground ladies and began to weave my web. I told her that I had permission from my teacher to go home and retrieve a book that was needed for a book report after recess. She eyed me suspiciously and ordered me to stay put while she went to confirm my story. When she turned a corner and disappeared from sight, I bolted.

I ran like Jackie Joyner-Kersey through the busy playground. As I sprinted past some boys kicking a ball in the soccer field, one of them yelled, "Where are you going?" My quick retort was "None of your biznis!" I zoomed past them in a speeding blur.

I arrived at my house, out of breath. Though I was wary of punishment for ditching school, I wanted my mom and pounded longingly on the door. Her eyes and mouth sprang open when she saw me. I frantically explained the events of the day, and she dismissed any sort of punishment, save having to go back to school the next day. I wallowed all evening in the dreaded anticipation of seeing Mrs. B. after what I had done. What would she say to me? Would I have to write more sentences?

I must admit, it feels very liberating to a child to be vindicated, and that's exactly what happened when I arrived at school. Mrs. B. asked if I was okay and apologized for losing my homework. She had found it on her desk but in the wrong stack of papers. There was a certain tenderness that she extended to me from that day forward, and I relished it.

That day as I sat at my desk listening to the rain wash the world outside, I felt washed on the inside, too. I had truly been baffled by the nerve I had when I fled the school grounds, running away from what I thought was a tragic fate—no popcorn. However, I gained a sense of strength and confidence that challenged the quiet, shy tendencies I had possessed.

I still have the twenty-five sentences I wrote that day, tucked in a photo album. That piece of paper, that relic of my childhood history, is twenty-nine years old and makes for great conversation.

My educational experiences have been pleasant and satisfying since then. I laugh with endearing whimsy at the little girl I once was, and I still have an inner attorney waiting to defend her if anyone should question the decision she made on that adventurous and liberating day back in second grade.

Lorie A. Parsons / Pacific Northwest



Western Heaven

Caroline O'Bryant / Tyler / Digital Photograph



Door to Beauty

Charlotte Motes / Whitehouse / 35mm Photograph



Pure in Heart

Donna Estes / Big Sandy / Digital Photograph



Untitled

Bailie Waters / Tyler / Acrylic



That's My Meme

Brandy Smith / Lindale / Black & White Photography

Thousand-Yard Stare

Thirty-six thousand inches of war-raped land:
Barren trenches etched with wire by man's hand.
Front to front, a rosy smear of flesh-coated ground,
Crows cackling as they wine and dine upon a human mound.

Three-thousand feet of volcanic sand burrowed as the shield of the enemy,
Crackling of burnt skin plays a sorrowful melody.
A cavity-encrusted mountain we must take;
The boat ride home most will not make.

Nine-hundred and fifteen meters of unsympathetic snow:
Frostbite has taken more than one finger and toe.
We pray for battle just to receive heat from our boiling blood;
A whistle and splashing mud; no one wants to see who has made the death thud.

Five-hundred fathoms of fiendish jungle terrorized with fire fights;
Camouflaged pajamas outline the target in many a rifleman's sights.
Breathe and squeeze and pray the round flies deadly and true;
Vitals of the jungle ghost cease as its skin turns from yellow to blue.

Soul-less pupils scan the battleground in search of foe;
All is quiet as ears listen to the eastern wind blow.
Gaping virgin eyes are gone now replaced by a deceiving glare;
Chiseled upon the veteran's brow is the thousand-yard stare.

Kody Allen Smith / Junction



Untitled

Cayla Thompson / Tyler / Acrylic

Nighttime Illusions

The cold wind whistled sweet songs of winter through her hair and sent prickles of excitement down her spine and through her arms.

The moon with its empty eyes and meaningless smile guided her through the darkness that was slowly consuming her and her thoughts.

She tilted her head towards the moon and envied the stars that constantly accompanied the endless sky, even though not always visible.

The stars reminded her of her hate of the moon for producing the dark shadows that constantly mimicked her every step.

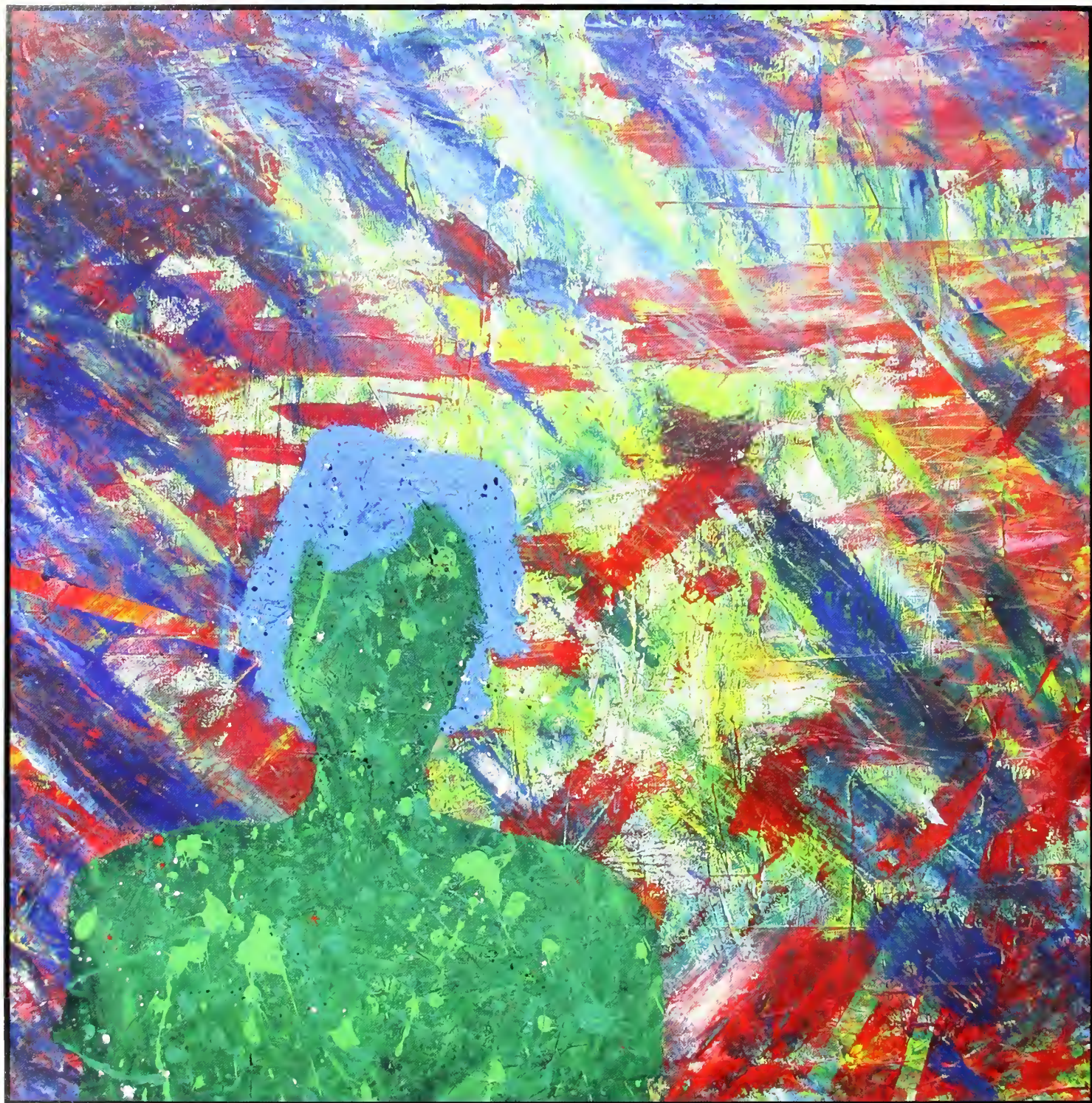
They played tricks with her mind with their perfect form of copying her movements.

The only shadows she truly respected were the ones that belonged to the towering trees laid out in her path.

The trees joined the wind in a beautiful ballet and birthed mesmerizing illusions upon the sidewalk.

Even though alone on her journey, she felt as if she were in a crowded room surrounded by beautiful and mysterious characters.

Haley Smith / Chandler



Roberto

Erika Garrett / Sulphur Springs / Acrylic

A Monotone Love Affair

I say hello—
You stay awhile to chat,
Mind elsewhere,
Head in the sand,
My words blocked by the earth in your ears.

You look at me—
I peer into your eyes,
Yet I don't see my reflection;
Only dark pools with nothing in their midst,
Only you fill your thoughts.

Speak to me—
Words monotone
And rehearsed.
Don't you love me anymore?

Where is the passion?
Did I only dream it?
Where is your adoration for me?
Did I make-believe it?

Touch me—
Hands cold,
No feeling.

Hold me—
Arms like tree trunks
Planted firmly at your side.

Kiss me—
Lips numb
And unwilling.

Love me—
Impossible.

Teri Klauser / Palestine



Kabooky

David Maldonado / Tyler / Acrylic



American Proud

Sondra Ramirez / Lindale / Digital Photograph

The Magnificent Skylar Bloom

There is no purer moment than when one first wakes up. Caught in the confusion of blinking in one world and opening eyes into another, nothing is real. In this brief moment of blissful ignorance, the mind has no thoughts, no worries, no sadness. But it doesn't last long.

She hadn't dreamed, but she had definitely been sleeping. Now she was lying in bed with her eyes still closed, enjoying the silence of both the room and her head. After about half a second, her awareness kicked in, and she immediately knew something was wrong. Why couldn't she hear any traffic coming from the highway?

She pried her eyes open, and fear washed over her in a cold sweat. She wasn't in her room at all. Everything was white—the walls, the sheets, the floor, even the shorts and T-shirt she had slept in. The room was empty except for her, the bed, and a cracked mirror that stood in the corner. Terrified, she swept her feet over the edge of the bed and stood up. There had to be a door somewhere. Running her hands along the wall, she hoped to feel a bump or dip in the texture, but neither one ever showed up.

"Hello?" she said with a tiny taste of desperation on her tongue, but the only response was her own voice echoing off the pristine walls.

She sat back down on the bed and waited for something—anything—to happen. After what she presumed to be about an hour, she left the bed once again and walked to the mirror. There was a spider web pattern directly in the center, and she saw a hundred tiny reflections of herself inside all the triangles and other shapes that decorated the surface of the glass. She moved her arms and spun around and watched the tiny versions in the mirror dance. A giggle escaped from her mouth, and she stopped. The sound seemed to impose on the emptiness that filled up the room. She was alone and scared. Just as she was about to return to her perch on the bed, something caught the light beneath the mirror. It was a silver sliver that she concluded could only have come from the mirror. When she picked up the piece of glass, it bit her finger. A speck of bright red peeked out from the tip. It was beautiful. After carefully searching, she found the place for the missing piece and returned it to its home. Taking a step back to admire the now complete mirror, she noticed the spider web was disappearing. All the triangles melted into each other, and suddenly the glass wasn't broken anymore. She touched the glass, and it rippled beneath her finger like a silvery lake. As the surface slowly calmed, she noticed the reflection of a man standing behind her. A little spooked, she quickly spun around, but no one was there. She looked back at the mirror to find the man smiling at her.

He was a handsome man. His navy blue suit was of an older style with long tails in the back. A navy blue top hat rested on his head, and his shiny black shoes were partially covered by white spats. There was a deep purple handkerchief folded inside his left breast pocket that matched his shirt perfectly. His right hand sat atop a shiny black cane, which he looked far too young to need. The girl couldn't think of a word to say, so he spoke instead.

"Hello, Iris. I am Skylar Bloom. Some refer to me as "magnificent," but I will let you decide that for yourself. You're probably a little confused, and maybe even the slightest bit afraid, but I assure you neither emotion is necessary. Now I don't have much time, so if you wouldn't mind, could you please take a step to your left?"

Iris complied.

Mr. Bloom tapped the glass with the end of his cane, and the mirror began to ripple again. He took a step forward, and to Iris's surprise, he stepped through the mirror and into the room. He removed his hat, revealing flawless brown hair that was slicked back and gleaming, and he spoke again.

"My dear Iris, I have brought you here because I see something very special in you; something you don't even see in yourself. My task is only to correct that issue and enable you to understand exactly what you are capable of." With this, Skylar tapped his cane on the end of the bed and an assortment of paints appeared. Iris was still speechless.

"I want you to make this room beautiful, Iris, and by beautiful I mean by your own standards, no one else's."

"But," Iris began.

Skylar raised a finger and stopped her before the words ever left her mouth. "Ah...I simply do not have time for questions, Iris. Now if you would please begin." As he spoke, Skylar walked to a corner of the room and tapped his cane on the floor. A solid white, straight-backed chair appeared, and he sat. He looked at Iris and waited.

Iris walked to the bed and picked up a brush. She dipped it into a can of red paint and inched towards the wall. She raised her hand to paint but then stopped. She had no idea how to begin. She glanced over at Mr. Bloom for the slightest bit of help, or even reassurance, but all she got was a perfect, goofy grin full of teeth and ambiguity. He didn't blink. She turned back to the wall and began with the only thing she truly knew. Iris painted words. She wrote her favorite words—the beautiful ones, the ones that tasted like sugar when she spoke them, the ones that bounced around in her brain all day long. Soon Iris was in a trance. She couldn't stop. Her heart pumped the words that flowed from her body to the brush and then onto the walls. Iris had no perception of time, but after what only felt like minutes, she had covered every inch with multicolored words as far as she could reach, but she wasn't done.

She looked at Skylar sitting on his chair in the corner, and before she could speak a word, he stood up and walked over to her. He touched her back with his cane, and a pair of wings immediately sprouted. She giggled as her feet lifted off the ground. To her surprise, flying was effortless, and she quickly submerged herself into her work once again. When Iris finally put down her brush and stepped back to marvel at her work, she was proud. She had put her heart in a glass and poured it out onto a canvas waiting to be turned into a masterpiece.

Mr. Bloom abandoned his chair again and put a hand on Iris's shoulder. "Well done, Iris. I knew you had it in you."

Iris could only smile back at him. She was exhausted, and for obvious reasons, she was out of words. She walked to the bed and collapsed onto the pillow that wasn't hers.

Iris woke to the smell of eggs and coffee and the noisy morning traffic on the highway that was only a hundred yards from her window. Before she wiped the sleep from her eyes, she thought of a strange dream she had. There was a man in a blue suit—a man who had given her wings. Soon hunger overcame her and drew Iris from her bed. She walked into the kitchen and said good morning to her mother who was scrambling eggs at the stove.

"Good morning, hon," Iris's mother replied, glancing up from the pan. She turned back to her cooking, but her eyes quickly shot back to her daughter. "Iris? Why do you have paint in your hair?"

Brytnie Edel / Waskom



Lights of the City

Eliseo Viramontes Jr. / Tyler / Prisma Colors

Daisy's Wake

I hear her calling in the night:
I can tell something isn't right.
She is a quiet little mouse,
But I know she's running through the house.
I place her between us, and she snuggles next to me;
Her tender love is bliss, this I can guarantee.
Her hair is golden wheat, blowing in the breeze;
I watch with wide eyes as she dreams with ease.
She smells of fresh wild flowers;
I could stay awake for hours.
She is with us now, and I know she will not weep:
I think it's safe to say that I can go to sleep.
She wakes as bright as the sun,
And all her resting is done.
She perks up like flowers in bloom:
Her happiness fills the room.
My bubbly baby bounces on the bed;
I pray she doesn't hit her head.
She is the light that brightens my day:
I wouldn't have it any other way.

Summer Ne'Cole McCawley / Van



Burnt Color

Jamie Dieter / Tyler / Digital Photograph and Photoshop

Relationship

Restless nights with
Each other together,
Lying in bed,
Amusing ourselves with humor,
Telling stories of when we first
Introduced ourselves at the
Opening in the forest, that
Night when we found ourselves
Stranded and lost in a meadow,
Hoping for someone to give us
Insight on finding our way out,
Pouring out our emotions through tears from laughter and of joy.

Eric Shelman / Tyler



The Lizard Queen

Jessica F. Sharp / Tyler / Digital Photograph and Photoshop



The Toadstool

Marilyn Brewster Jackson / Henderson / Digital Photograph

Mamie

Your hugs took my pain away;
Your voice cooled me like
Swimming in a pool on a hot summer's day.
I cried a river to keep the pain away.

Louisiana visits were not the same without you:
No one to see me, to spoil me, and share my secrets.
You defined what unconditional love was to me.
The day you died, I wondered why God was punishing me.

The day before you passed, you were not the same:
Your hugs felt restrained; in your voice I heard pain.
Next image, you falling, strapped to that steel hospital bed.
Ambulance lights were a tornado warning of what was to come.

Your funeral was the worst experience an eight-year old could have:
Smiling as if I was okay, knowing it was far from what was.
You were supposed to be here to see me graduate;
I wanted to make you proud, now that you're gone, I don't know how.

For years I wondered why He took my grandma away from me
Until one day I felt your pain releasing hugs around me
And realized you will be there to see me succeed and to protect me.
He never took you away—He just made you my angel.

Kierra Berry / Fort Worth



Texas Skull

Wayne Taliaferro / Kilgore / Digital Photograph



Early Morning

Todd Lange / Flint / Digital Photograph

Life Consuming

The monster is here. Here in me. I can't feel the monster
Growing, growing in me,
Consuming my life.

The poisons are here. Here in me. I can't smell the poisons
Fighting, fighting in me,
Consuming my life.

The pain is here. Here in me. I can't taste the pain
Engulfing, engulfing me,
Consuming my life.

The exhaustion is here. Here in me. I can't see the exhaustion
Invading, invading me,
Consuming my life.

The scars are here. Here in me. I can't hear the scars
Covering, covering me,
Consuming my life.

The hope is here. Here in me. I feel, smell, taste, see, hear it
Growing, growing in me,
Consuming my life.

Peggy Cooper / Tyler

Pounding Away

My mind and heart don't see
Large paunch, fat neck, big ass.
And though gorgeous I'll never be,
I feel my looks should pass.

I am not slender nor am I thin;
Why can't my perceptions count?
And like the paleness of my skin,
A gentleman's glimpse discount.

It's like the torments of my youth
Still haunt me to this day:
They force me in a mystic booth
And to me they oink, they bark, they bray.

And those young boys, they grew to men,
And stop, you'd think they should.
Yet time and time and time again
Continue with mooing they would.

When asked of husband, he did say
"Not unattractive, you are."
Hopes had I of that old cliché
"You're beautiful to me, by far."

I asked myself what would I do
If suddenly single I should be:
Would a handsome man be true
And want to be with me?

With hopes he could see past my look
And get to know my soul:
Reading the chapters of my book
And fancying me as a whole.

Because I feel the beauty inside of me
With youthfulness abound,
But in the mirror when I do see,
In shame, I turn around.

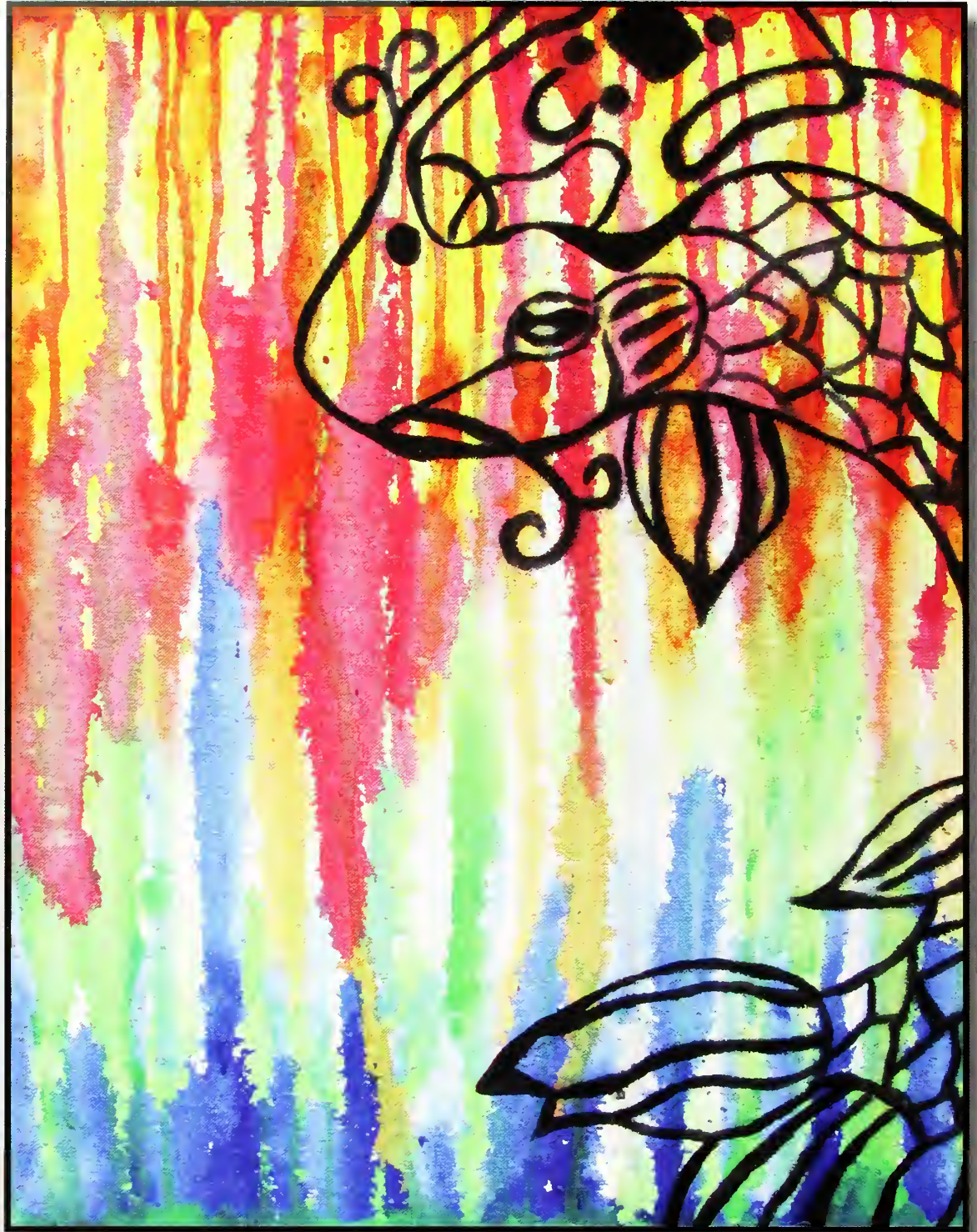
This weight's a battle I've often fought,
And up and down it goes.
The diet plans for which I ought—
Got on, got off—BMI still grows.

Lap-band procedure, should I dare
To quickly lose the weight?
A request is made within a prayer
That it'll raise my metabolic rate.

But a "magic pill" it is, I think,
And skeptic of it I'd be.
For cravings are quite hard to sink,
And moderation is still the key.

So if moderation is the goal
and I must reduce the flow,
Lord, please reach within my soul
and help me to say "whoa."

Charlotte Motes / Whitehouse



Number 1

Taylor Anderson / Tyler / Acrylic and Oil

Snow Knows

Your hard tactics helped us improve our writing,
Constantly howling like a storm for us to think deeper;
Never-ending adventure stories kept our minds marathon-running,
Encouraging us to turn crazy encounters into writing.

Your stare could make a grown man jump,
So it made our hearts beat fast and knees shake;
With your big hoot-owl eyes scowlin' down on us,
We knew that we had to give an almost Olympic-athlete best.

You made us sing and clap to learn phrases,
Endless rhymes helped us remember more.
You made us do zany things to learn,
But in the end your approach made us better students.

Your room always smelled of coffee,
Which kept you more energized than we.
Your spooky, cat-like laugh could be heard
Down the hall to the next class.

Staying up many nights writing papers
And researching for your many assignments
Made us go crazy sometimes,
But I'm grateful I had you as a teacher, Mrs. Snow.

Kolisha Polk / Big Sandy



Autumn Hay

Cristina Diana-Victoria Carter / Burcharest, Romania / Sepia Photograph

The Sketch

Rising silently from fields of grey,
A vacant sun chills lifeless terrain.
Then, sharply cruel gusts cut through frigid airs
While from unfeeling flesh seep numb graphite tears.

Trees stung by death abruptly appear,
As thick charcoal wisps are etched threateningly near.
Lacking in faith and devoid of all hope,
Lost, faceless spirits wander upon each mumbling slope.

Thorny and dry seems the land that is seen
Where apathy and misery reign in supreme.

Though suddenly with a flick, haughty eyes mock my own
As lightly shaded lashes swiftly are grown.
Then crudely they vanish in a flash of light pink,
For my panicking fingers have once more lapsed in strength.

Rapidly like venom the agony returns
With flames that erupt causing falsity to burn.
No sprig of trust could ever survive,
For this desolate portrait murders all that's alive.

Utterly despondent, my fate is the same,
For this world is too real as it calls me by name.
As my pencil calmly stills over this miserable sketch,
I, the artist of my ghastly soul, quite painfully reflect.

Samantha Trimble / Tyler



Beautiful Church



Skeleton of a Body, Wasted by Disease

David Maldonado / Tyler / Acrylic



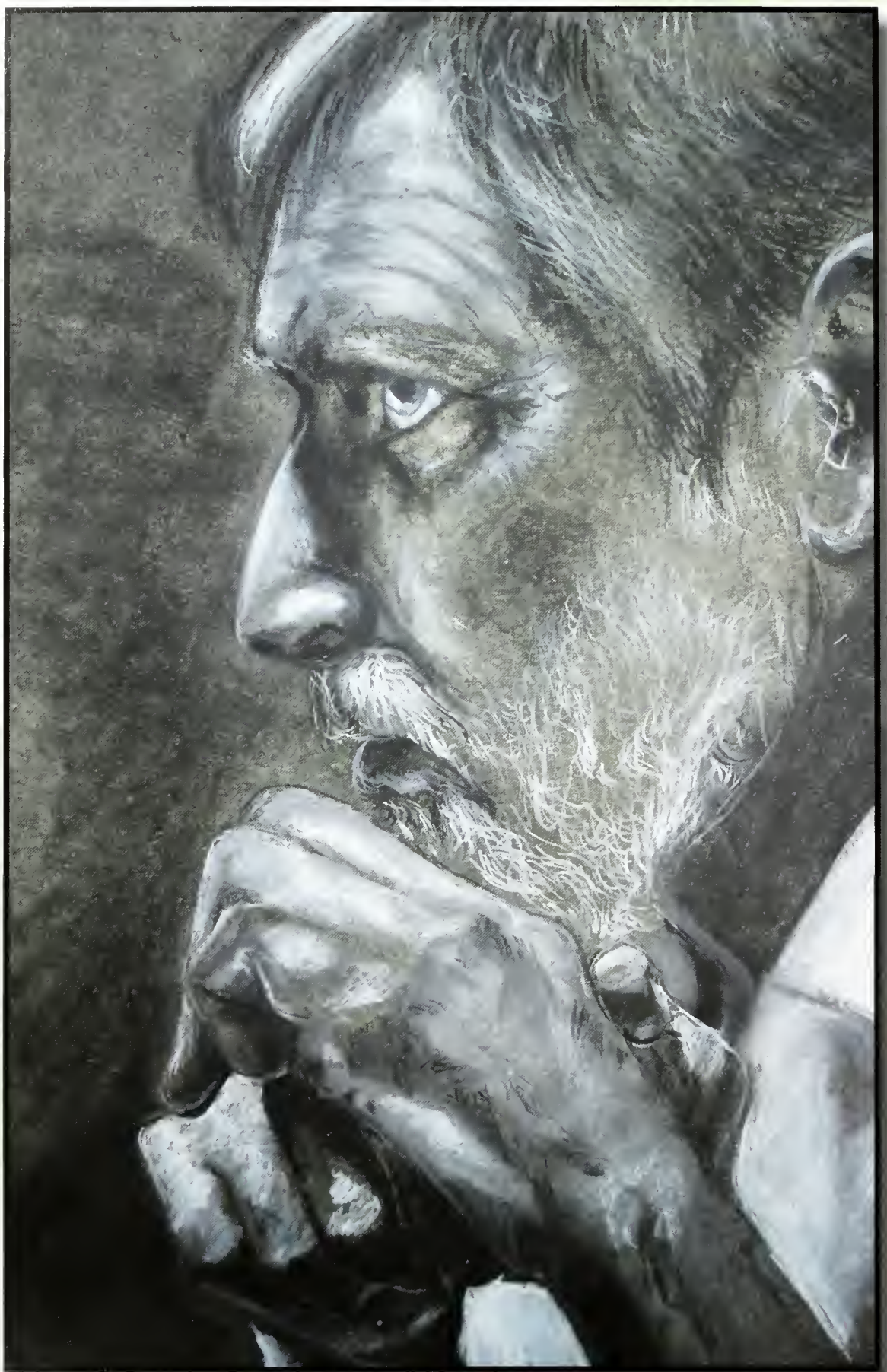
Lost in Thought

Samantha Trimble / Tyler / Technical Pen and White Charcoal



Untitled

Kelsey White / Tyler / Acrylic



Mike

Moving Day

As the family all gathered around the table,
We all knew they had big news to share:
Once again, we were moving. But this time
Was different. We weren't little kids anymore.

Every emotion was running through my head:
High school is a jungle, and I had just found
Where I fit into it. I wasn't ready to face the
Predators again. Fear struck my mind.

The first day of school was like a bad movie,
Throwing up in class and all. BMW's, Range
Rovers and Lexuses lined the parking lot. A
Weed in a bed of roses, I was alone.

After months of living as a hermit crab, I realized
As much as I complained, I wasn't moving back.
A bird flying for the first time, I had nothing
To fear, fear was keeping me from my life.

Things were finally back to normal and I was
A wave going through the motions. The wave
Crashed as the family gathered around the table
And we knew they had big news to share.

Brooke Jorgensen / Frisco



Boxed

Shattered Dreams

I can't control it:
Seems like I'm the only one who knows what "it" is.
I've tried my best to let my mind rest,
But this heart of mine is beating with impatience.
I think to myself—pace it.
Tears of wanting the unknown are very familiar to me now,
And I'm starting to watch this glass filled with belief hit the ground.
Hope—lost, leaving its signature for everyone to see;
Noticeable displays of the naked truth—defeat.
Insecurity is what I breathe,
And no matter how fast I run, failure follows me.
Family asking when I'm going to leave for the immense quest,
I forge a smile, say I'll be here for a while.
They don't know that my plans are dancing with evaporation;
They don't know that Ms. Perfect is fakin'.
"Money doesn't grow on trees" is what the wise man tells me,
So how am I supposed to leave for the big city with only a little money? Please tell me.
Breathe easy
In an undersized room.
Think positive
Only fools do.
The bright lights are vanishing while I'm busy losing my sanity;
Life forever in a small town is viciously laughing at me.
God help me before I end all of this misery:
Please send me hope because I'm running on empty.
Quicksand beneath my feet, my fight has calmed down.
How did I submerge like this? So deep inside of my pain.
I was supposed to be a star—everyone was going to know my name.
I should have kept pushing towards my destiny,
But I let the negativity bring me to a standstill.
And that mind-frame crashed into by battered ability to prevail.
So here I am—
Alone,
Depressed,
Lying on the floor
In a puddle of hopelessness
Beside my shattered dreams.

April Miller / Jacksonville



Carmike versus Death



Tres Objetos

Alejandro Alfaro / Tyler / Acrylic



Dedicated to Molly Stanley January 8, 1985-April 18, 2010

"They call me Little Fire Cracker," Molly once told me with that daring little smile followed by that unforgettable laugh. She was what many students called a breath of fresh air, a true friend, and a talented artist. She was never afraid to speak her mind or to challenge those in power.

You could never forget the way she lived her life to the fullest or the kind of joy she shared with others as often as she could. There was never a bad day for Molly, never a time when she didn't smile. There was only one kind of emotion she brought to the classroom everyday, and that was joy.

She was often the voice of the crowd and the teachers' favorite student. There was never anything she was afraid to try or any person she was unwilling to help. Molly was what many called an earthly angel, and through the lives she's changed and the people she's touched, her love, kindness, joy, and friendship will live on forever within our hearts.

We love you, Molly Stanley, our dearest and closest friend.

~ Joshua Mumphrey

Tyler Junior College

